

Mostly Online Master's Reflective Practice Portfolio

The Ohio State University

Department of Art Education

Beverly Cornell

Summer 2011

Table Of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	2
Chapter 2: Essay 1.....	6
Chapter 3: Essay 2.....	24
Chapter 4: Conclusion/Synthesis.....	42
References.....	48
Appendix.....	50

Chapter 1: Introduction

I began my journey as an art educator in the late 1970's after graduating with a B.S. Art Education degree from Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pennsylvania. This was well before Stephen Dobbs published the DBAE Handbook. During my undergraduate program art history was taught as an isolated discipline and instruction and testing was strictly formed by memory and multiple choice. Art criticism was not taught and aesthetics was simply a vocabulary term. What I *was* expertly taught was to become a master of all techniques involving fine arts and crafts. During my first years as an art instructor I struggled to survive by trying to impress young students with my newly acquired studio skills. The students seemed to have their own agendas which had nothing to do with the principals or elements of art and they had little interest in the practice makes perfect method I had been following in my own artistic development. I quickly learned to develop lessons that were fun for students and looked good hanging in displays. All of my expert training was set aside as I taught lessons that required students to follow steps, directions, and examples in order to produce nice works that all looked similar.

During my teaching practice in the 1980's art pedagogy developed the paradigm of Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE). I became aware of the ideas of DBAE by attending art conferences and keeping up with research published by NAEA. I began to enroll in graduate courses that helped me to learn how to use DBAE and how to use authentic assessment techniques. During these years of my teaching experience I had the good fortune to live in various locations within the USA and Europe. My visual experiences in seeing the art and architecture of such a variety of times and cultures inspired me to focus on learning about art criticism. In 1993, while living in South Carolina, I decided to return to Kutztown University to

take a graduate course during a summer institute. I selected Marilyn Stewart's course of art criticism. During this course Terry Barrett was a guest presenter. Taking this course sparked a passion for aesthetics and criticism in me and inspired me to permanently change my curriculum to include art criticism learning. At this point in time my focus was on helping my students form big questions while investigating art with the goal of learning more about art. In my teaching practice I was also involved with adding historical multicultural resources and activities into my studio lessons.

As the twenty first century began I felt that I had changed my art instruction in a positive way and that my students were getting the best possible curriculum. While my curriculum was improved I was still teaching the components of DBAE in isolation from each other and my focus was still on teaching about art – not with art. During the first decade of the new millennium arts teachers were implored to focus on arts integration. The underlining reason for arts teachers to embrace integration was to secure the importance of arts instruction as a support for increasing student scores on high stakes standardized tests critical to the federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. As an adjunct instructor I taught undergraduate general education students how to integrate the fine arts into other curriculum core subjects. While the debate about the importance of arts instruction as a support for other core subjects verses stand alone disciplines will continue I believe that the way integration is designed within a whole school curriculum determines its value.

I am the only art teacher in my school, Millwood Elementary, Sumter, South Carolina. Sumter is named for Thomas Sumter, the fighting Gamecock of the American Revolution. Sumter was born of backcountry settlements and was mainly an agriculture economy until 1941 when Shaw Air Force Base was opened. Today Shaw is home to the 20th Fighter Wing, 9th Air

Force Headquarters, and the Third Army Command. The other employers in Sumter are the typical community service employers and factories that make auto parts, medical containers, cardboard packaging, and poultry processing. Sumter boasts a strong patriotism culture. Millwood is one of seven elementary schools of Sumter School District # 17, the city district. The large surrounding county of Sumter has a separate school district. In July 2011 the two districts will merge into a single consolidated district. Sumter is considered a mid-sized city with a population of nearly forty thousand. Sumter's median household income is thirty two thousand dollars and the median value of owner occupied homes is eighty thousand dollars. Nearly seventeen percent of persons in Sumter are considered to live below poverty status. The racial make up of Sumter is fifty percent black, forty six percent white, and the remaining four percent listing Latino or Asian race. (U.S. Census Bureau) Attendance in a particular school is based on established residential zoning lines with exceptions given for staff dependents, NCLB requests, and principal discretion.

Sumter is proud to have a campus of the University of South Carolina. Students can enroll in a two-year program ending with an associate degree or enter one of the five available four-year programs. The campus also allows general elementary education majors to complete their course work for graduation from another campus while attending the Sumter campus. These students are required to enroll in the course *Fine Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* that is taught by a Sumter public school art educator serving as an adjunct instructor for the university.

Millwood Elementary School is a regular school in that it does not have any charter or magnet school programs. Millwood enrolls over six hundred students in grades kindergarten through five. The demographics of Millwood closely mirror the city demographic. Millwood qualifies for Title 1 funding and the funding is used school wide. Fifty three percent of students

qualify for either reduced or free lunches, of these forty six percent qualify for the free lunch. Millwood meets the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards of the federal No Child Left Behind act each year, with ninety percent of students meeting standards in English and eighty percent of students meeting standards in math. Millwood has a strong PTA group. Teachers are mandated to attend PTA general and board meetings. The PTA consistently manages fund raising programs which reward students who participate. The related arts programs at Millwood are isolated and curriculum integration is limited. Arts teachers do not have shared planning time with teachers of core subjects. Arts teachers within the district have one half-day of shared meeting time during the first week of school each year. The district does not provide any funding for arts teachers to attend conferences or development courses. Attendance at the state or national arts education conferences is discouraged due to the impact of teacher absence. The students attend related arts in groups of diverse ability levels. Some students are excluded from arts instruction to attend resource instruction while others from self-contained classes are included as a part of their IEP accommodations. Students receive fifty minutes of each related arts subject per week.

Chapter 2: Essay 1

A.E. 767, *Critical Analysis of Multicultural Art Education: Theory and Practice*, focused on related issues of art education. Art educators were urged to embrace the cultural diversity of their stakeholders while reflecting upon how their own culture influences their curriculum and teaching style. Participants studied arts-based service-learning; specifically the way integration of community service through the strategy of designing authentic student experiences is directly related to the enduring learning goals of a meaningful art education.

It is important to provide experiences that enrich our student's learning and lives through multicultural learning embracing diversity. This type of learning can help to erase intolerance and replace it with understanding. Most art curriculum includes content describing and illustrating the cultures of distant and foreign places. Multiculturalism is also close and within our community and includes gender, age, ability, race, religion, and various identifiers. Educators must go beyond what is comfortable and familiar when studying cultures because the goal of multicultural learning does not end with pride but begins a peace process. Multicultural learning can heal and promote human understanding when students are introduced to the reasons cultures look and act different; and students can accept differences without giving up their own viewpoint. Educators can facilitate experiences encouraging students to accept and value what is different and to see that people who are not like them appreciate them.

Over the years I have built an art curriculum with an emphasis on inclusion of the art of all cultures, however I defined the cultures mainly by geography. Previously my multicultural lessons were based on the art of countries I had been to, countries of my student's heritage, countries our school visited as themes, and countries that practiced techniques I thought my

students would enjoy trying. This course has remind me that so many more cultural identifiers should be considered and including even more variety will enrich my curriculum and open up the doors I want to invite my students to pass through.

A.E. 767 challenged the participants to merge service-learning with multicultural learning while forming a meaningful visual art lesson plan for students. Combining the two types of learning takes the classroom into the community and opens the door into cultures in a way that allows students to investigate a problem and form a solution. Dr. Min Cho expressed this idea in 2007 in an NAEA Advisory article. She wrote, “Service-learning projects enable students to learn formal curriculum while making a personal connection with the community.” (Cho, 2007). She warns the designers of any project that not all service-learning ideas provide new learning for students and therefore the planning of the project is critical. In her advisory she wrote, “The service, as well as the academic instruction, must provide some meaning for the student to retain, advocate, or even disagree with the meaning. Regardless, learning is involved – learning that conveys meaning” (Cho, 2007). Reciprocal learning between cultures is a valuable outcome of the blend of multicultural learning and service-learning. This reciprocity occurs only if the community group becomes an active resource in the project. The community group should not be a passive recipient of the service. Dr. Karen Hutzal wrote a reflection about her experiences of arts-based service-learning with the community of Cincinnati, Ohio. She planned a project with a goal of creating change through curriculum in which she connected her students with the community group. Her statement, “In making these connections, the process of developing community relationships often becomes a forgotten – although key – component to successful reciprocal learning experiences.” (Hutzal, 2006, p. 13) confirms the importance of the interaction of both the student and community groups.

I believe that if I had been asked to design a service-learning project without the information I gained during this course I would have designed a poor example of service learning. I had become complacent into accepting the curriculum of charitable giving as the best form of service learning. Making art to go along with the charitable giving did not make the project an authentic service-learning experience. Designing a project for my students that involved reciprocal learning was a challenge that required planning and time. My former type of service learning did not and this is why it had become the model – it was quick, repetitive (new instruction not needed), and did not interrupt the focus of the standard curriculum. It looked good in newspaper articles but little learning was taking place. The contributors and recipients became more differentiated than united. There was no student or teacher reflection, the projects did not require or inspire any. There were no changes in understanding or solutions to problems.

The following descriptions will explain how my multi-cultural service-learning project began, progressed, and concluded. In my classroom my students were exploring the big idea of place in a personal way. They created meaningful expressive art about their experiences while wearing one specific pair of shoes. They also investigated maps and how artists have interpreted their places with the art of maps. My students created their own artistic personal maps. At this time I decided to involve my students with the investigations of the places of other people. This goal led to the design of the multi-cultural service-learning project *Nursing Home Visits*. My students learned how Pepón Osorio interpreted the place of a woman named Tina. Her home was destroyed by fire and he created a sculptural piece interpreting the emotional loss of her home. The sculpture became an installation when he presented it as a traveling artwork. His art changed the space it entered as it recalled the place it remembered. I wanted my students to transfer this learning into a project allowing them to interact with nursing home residents, learn of their loss

of a home, and create a meaningful interpretation of the home. I thought that the artworks created by my students could then *visit* the nursing home and change the space while evoking an emotional reaction. I wondered if the reaction would help the nursing home residents and perhaps lessen their feeling of loss. I wondered if my students might exhibit evidence of their own emotions during the project.

My service-learning project *Nursing Home Visits* has been the most rewarding lesson I have ever participated in. It was not easy to plan and, like big ideas, one can never stop thinking about it. The students who worked in this lesson become more cooperative and less disruptive when compared to similar groups working on other lessons. They still had conflicts and behavior that needed to be improved however when I discuss it with them they were more open to trying to change for the better rather than feeling resentful, defensive, or apathetic. During the work time they talked more about the project and related questions and less about unrelated issues. If the project is the reason for this difference than I am even more convinced that well planned service learning is a valuable curriculum component. I also noticed that these students presented more meaningful and personal questions, especially questions relating nursing home living to their own family concerns. The students were very excited about the building process and enjoyed having assigned construction jobs. I believe these students will reflect upon this learning as they progress through life and become involved in aging issues within their families, jobs, and self.

The project *Nursing Home Visits* investigated displacement. Memories are important. Displacement from your home is difficult and emotional. Creating a visual memory of your home can help you to connect emotions with memories.

This project brought together two groups of participants – 23 fifth grade students and 6 nursing home residents. Together the students and residents created six 3-D memory houses that can easily move from one place to another. The design and embellishment reflected information learned from research. The residents were asked student selected questions specifically about details and stories of their former homes. In class the students used this research to design and build memory houses that reflected the resident's memories. The artworks were revealed to the residents during their weekly activity hour. The reveal took the form of a gallery opening during which a video of the students talking about their involvement in the project was viewed.

The residents learned that young people care about their circumstances and learned that their life experiences are important motivators for young students. The students learned that life experiences, even difficult ones like home displacement, are important and help to create who we are and who we will become. The students' views about nursing homes were challenged during the project and sometimes altered. They expressed emotional connections to their work and the resident's stories and the act of doing something to help another person.

The problems and difficulties I encountered included the difficult process of logistics (I could not take my students to the nursing home and the residents could not visit my school), time allocation (construction always exceeds estimated completion dates), organization of tasks, and disruption of the class group (1 student moved, 1 was temporarily relocated, and 2 new students enrolled). In the future I will collaborate with other teachers to help provide more work time and to increase cross-curriculum collaboration (with social studies, math, and language arts teachers).

The following descriptions provide examples from three categories of learning that illustrate my application of the goals of this course. An account of the documented results of student learning is included. The results were a product of the qualitative study I accomplished.

Cooperative Learning

My students were exploring the big idea of place. In the first lesson the students drew their own shoe and then used the drawing as a component of a new artwork in which they used images and text to tell the story of their personal journey while wearing the shoe. The students learned about themselves while creating the artwork and enjoyed learning about each other when the completed works were viewed and discussed. The second artmaking activity facilitated a shift away from self-exploration and onto a focus of making art to tell another person's story.

In this lesson the classroom dynamics were modified when the students changed from working alone to working on a team and consulting with adults other than the teacher to create artworks. I wanted my students to understand displacement, loss, and how a memory of a past place is an important way to evoke emotion. I wanted my students to learn how an artist, like Pepón Osorio, can use memory, loss, and emotion as a subject for artmaking and how the art can be used as a tool for healing and recovery. My students viewed an Art21 video about Osorio's interaction with a family who lost their home due to a fire. (Tatge, 2003) My students viewed the image of the artwork "*Tina's House*".



(Osorio, 1999-2000)

During a class discussion I was excited when my students eagerly described the meanings of images and found objects attached to the house. The students participated in another class discussion proposing questions to ask each resident in order to learn more about a home they once lived in and about their memories of that home. The students listened to the residents answer the questions through a video recording.

My students were assigned to a team and paired up with one resident. My students entered the art classroom excited to build model houses. They had viewed the video interviews of the residents and had compiled lists of ideas for the symbolic and realistic elements of their creations. Each team had foam core house parts to work with. I showed them where they could obtain materials such as wallpaper, felt, cloth, foam sheets, etc... I didn't want to influence their choices so I temporarily gave up my role as leader. I turned the job over to them. They started out with great excitement, moved around looking for materials, picking up materials, talking...but as I observed them I noticed that nothing was actually being accomplished at any table. Students were talking to students at tables other than their own. One group went to the wallpaper books and each student collected numerous samples. They had an enormous amount of wallpaper and began arguing about who would pick it and who would glue it. I began to think, "Why aren't they forming a plan and assigning jobs? I thought about how this would actually work in the real world, how do we know what to do at work? I decided that I needed a plan to help the students become efficient and at the same time have a real life experience.

The next time they entered the art classroom they found nametags with job titles written on them. Within each team the jobs of roofer, front wall, sidewall, and picture wall were assigned. They were instructed to think of their table as a construction site and remember to respect the construction sites of others. It was not easy for them to coordinate with each other in

order for the house to look consistent but they felt more responsible and less distracted. The job descriptions really helped the students focus and to accomplish specific tasks. During an interview I asked Nayonna to tell me about working on a team during this project. She said, *“Working on a team is faster and easier, it was good; when you work by yourself it takes longer and is harder. It was a very good time working with my team and it was fun.”*

The teams progressed and accomplished tasks yet they had a lot to coordinate in order to create a unified object that told the story of the resident. I noticed that the students had a few disagreements about the work done by another member of a their team. For example, when the wallpaper was selected the students sometimes used different patterns for each wall because each person used their favorite instead of agreeing on one. One team completely recovered the inside and outside of the house after an active discussion about the choices. During an interview I asked a member of this team to describe her experience of working on a team during this project. Baylee said, *“We have people that do the roof, the floor, the picture sides and everything. We would pretty much help each other to get through with it all and get it done together. Sometimes you mess things up and sometimes you can get into a fight.”*

When the students were adding the symbolic and realistic elements to tell the story of the resident’s memory I noticed that the students sometimes worked together and supported their team member’s efforts but at other times they argued about what was happening in the process. I think that this is reflective of life in that we have so many possibilities and ideas and it is hard to give in to another person when we think our idea is the best one. Over all my students learned that working together, despite the conflicts, provides the motivation we all need to persevere in accomplishing a task. Davonta expressed this well when he said, *“I liked working on a team because by myself I would have struggled. The people I work with they’re a lot helpful- you have*

other people helping you; sometimes we fuss and fight, sometimes we can get along and do projects, sometimes we just be lazy. They are petty nice, they are mean sometimes.”



My student Davonta (grey shirt) was working with his team.

Experiencing Authentic Learning

I knew that my students had opinions about nursing homes but I didn't know that they were scared of nursing homes. Some students even thought of living in a nursing home as a form of personal or family failure. I had planned to introduce my students to the culture of nursing homes as a career possibility or as a solution to a family's dilemma. I didn't know if the interaction of my students with nursing home residents during the artmaking project would allow my students to have new viewpoints and/or release of fears.

During an interview Nayonna told me what she thought of nursing homes based on her past experiences and how her views have been altered. She said, “ *My grandma used to be in one. It was okay. It was sad to hear the resident talk about missing their home. It was a little touchy because I wouldn't want to lose my home and have to go to a nursing home. I thought they were icky and smelly and I thought there were people who were germmy and mean, and so we see now that that's not true.*” I was amazed that she was able to express her emotion of fear concerning her future and to be able to talk about how she may have become less fearful.

During an interview Davonta recalled his childhood emotions of getting hurt by people. He expressed the feeling of helplessness that a child experiences when things are out of one's control. This may be one of the fears people have concerning nursing homes – giving control away. He has strong emotions based on past experiences and his personal reflections about his reactions to the project seem to allow him to make some interesting connections and learn something about himself in the process. He was asked to think about how the resident felt and how he felt about leaving one home for another. He thought, *“She loved the house and she really wanted to go back for it, when she talked about it it made me want to spread some tears. I thought it was when people get sick and they just go there, like my grandma, she went there and then she passed away. My aunt works in a nursing home and she might take me there. I am not scared to go now, I was when I was little because I was afraid of people; now that I am big I know I can defend myself and I know nothing can happen to me”*.

One student, Baylee, experienced her authentic learning not only in cognitive ways but also in physical learning. When I interviewed her I asked her how it felt to hear the resident's video stories. She said, *“It was hurtful because they don't have that house anymore but it was kind of a little upside in there because they have a new home. Nursing homes have millions of different people and they just miss their homes that they used to live in.”* Baylee's recognition that all residents miss their homes was important to her understanding of displacement and recovery. Baylee was a student who truly enjoyed the act of making things. Her team wanted to show a man painting the side of the house. She decided to construct a ladder and human figure holding a can of paint and a brush by using self-hardening clay. We did not have this material available in class so she asked her mother to buy it for her and she made the three-dimensional object at home. When I asked her what she learned from her work in the project she said, *“I*

learned how to make stuff out of different stuff. What I remember from the project is that how I built it and what I built it from so I could make a house of my own.” Baylee learned that her family supported her learning and that she could get help to make what her vision required. She worked alone on this object but she did it for the success of her team and the project. Her success in building the object helped her to gain confidence in her artmaking abilities and gave her an experience to remember – she can create!

Altruism

School is a social situation. The students interact with adults and each other in various tasks and work in a culture designed to promote learning all day long. Students learn socially and emotionally from school lessons and this influences the behavior of students and eventually influences their life long learning attitude. My students didn’t start this project with a blank slate of experiences and emotions, they brought past learning and past experience into the classroom setting. My students are in the developmental stage of discovering whom they are in relation to how others relate to them. Their emotional state is sensitive and elastic. This is a critical time for the development of self-control. As Davonta stated, “...*I can take care of myself now.*”

As students begin to understand that life is not solely controlled by external events and people they can begin to develop their own internal belief system that allows them to shift control to self. As they begin to accept that they are in control and begin to take care of self they have the task of learning that they can take care of others as well. I believe that service-learning projects provide a rich experience that can facilitate emotional and social development while being fun and meaningful at the same time. I did not know if my students would show any concern for others or if they would care about the stories of the nursing home residents.

During an interview with Nayonna I learned that she felt positive recognition from her family about her concern for others. She said, *“At home I told them about the project and they said that is great because you are doing for a person.”* Nayonna’s family helped reinforce her learning experience and Nayonna may transfer this learning during her future experiences. By attaching a positive emotion to a social learning activity Nayonna learned that doing something for another person also rewards the person performing the action of giving, making, or caring. I wondered what Nayonna personally thought about making something that was not for herself. I asked Nayonna how she felt about making the house for the nursing home resident. She said, *“I learned that making things for people, or even just the littlest things, can make people feel special. I will remember that this house is for someone so make it special for that person.”* Nayonna will grow up and interact with people socially in her work and personal life; her belief that *“...even just the littlest things...”* is a tool that will enhance her success in work and life.



My student Nayonna (purple shirt) was working with her team.

Baylee, who was the student most eager to do the hands on activities, was excited and proud of the work she had done at home and contributed her time and materials with a joyful attitude. Not all students are willing to give their things up so easily. Baylee accepted affirmation from her own family when they helped her obtain the clay and allowed her to work at home. I

asked her how she and her family felt about creating an artwork that would be given away she said, *“My family thought it was cool that we were doing this house for somebody else. The thing I enjoyed the most about the project is that it’s not for us, it is for someone else that we are doing it for.”* It was evident that Baylee loved the physical activity of artmaking, therefore I was surprised that she said the thing she enjoyed the most about the project was that the work her team did was for someone else. I believe Baylee will remember that using her skills and talents is a powerful way to benefit others while providing her with the positive feeling of self-fulfillment.

Davonta experienced a personal crisis during the project when he had to attend a different school for part of the time. When he returned to his team the house was different and things had changed. At first he displayed some anger and even got into fights with one of his team members. I observed one of the incidents in which Davonta reached over and took the pencil of another boy. The boy became mad at Davonta and demanded the return of his pencil by saying, *“Davonta took my pencil.”* Davonta returned the pencil and said, *“You are calling me a thief, and every one is always saying I steal.”* Davonta was very emotional and unwilling to listen to anyone at this point. I knew that he had been getting into a lot of trouble since he had returned and I had heard his name mentioned by other teachers who were complaining about his bad behavior. I told him to think about how his actions actually looked to others, that he did take the pencil, and that the student simply wanted it back. I said that if he did not want negative remarks he would have to stop providing the evidence that caused the remarks. Davonta loved working on the project however he would refuse to work if he did not get his own way, so sometimes he accomplished a lot while other times he accomplished nothing. Davonta was very sensitive to the views his peers had of him and was very absorbed in his own image. I don’t think Davonta reached the level of caring for others that was evident by the other students however he did use

his work on the project as a way to feel better about himself. For Davonta building self-worth is his way of overcoming the shame he might feel about other aspects of his life. When I asked him how he felt about his work on the project he said, *“I’m lucky I came back because if I wouldn’t be back the house wouldn’t be the same. I told my mom and sister about the it, they thought it was wonderful.”* He revealed that he is concerned for himself and has a tight grip on his emotional connection to his family. While Davonta may not have developed as much concern for others during his work on the project he did attach emotions to his participation and accomplishment. Davonta has a future full of social interaction and he has conflicting emotions he must deal with as he makes decisions and choices. Students, especially ones like Davonta, need a curriculum that includes social and emotional learning in addition to context learning in order to address and influence their cognitive and behavioral growth leading towards overall success in school, work, and life.



My student Baylee (reaching into the house) was working with her team.

The project surprised me. I wanted my students and the residents to achieve reciprocal learning. In addition my students learned more about themselves in the process. This occurred because the lesson gave my students an opportunity to experience social and emotional learning (SEL). Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger describe SEL

instruction as “...learning that provides students with opportunities to contribute to their class, school, and community and experience the satisfaction, sense of belonging, and enhanced motivation that comes from such involvement (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004).” (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011, pp. 2-3) Additionally, “SEL programming fosters students’ social-emotional development through establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities (Cook et al., 1999; Hawkins et al., 2004; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004).” (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011, p. 3) “Together these components promote personal and environmental resources so that students feel valued, experience greater intrinsic motivation to achieve, and develop a broadly applicable set of social-emotional competencies that mediate better academic performance, health-promoting behavior, and citizenship (Greenberg et al., 2003).” (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011, p. 3)

When I began this project my goal was to move beyond service-learning that simply used my students as decorators or donors into activities that facilitated actual learning and changes in my students’ development of compassion and caring, and most importantly fostered empowerment for creating solutions. During the research phase of the project I began to see that my students were expressing emotions not only from their own point of view (as expected) but also from the point of view of others (the residents) and that was a learning situation for me. I even felt the change in myself. At first it was uncomfortable to think about the residents. My students and I had to take a risk in getting to know them because their stories caused our emotions to rise as we all connected our personal fears and experiences to those of the residents. My students often wanted to create a house that was a fantasy – the

house *they* would want to live in. They had to release their own desires in order to create images that mirrored the resident's memory. In the end my students all hoped that the resident they created their house for would like and enjoy it.

My research revealed that my students felt valued, were motivated by a sense of involvement, involved their families, enjoyed peer work, and experienced an association with the community of nursing home residents. I hope that this project will positively influence my students' future learning as students, community members, caregivers, and life-long learners.

My research about service-learning has taught me that, "As a curricular tool, service-learning makes use of formal, academic learning within real-world settings, providing students with opportunity to apply what they have learned to the benefit of themselves, their collaborators, and the wider society. The resultant learning is reciprocal. (Russell & Hutzel, 2007, p.8)" (Lawton, 2010)



A Memory House

Participating in this course taught me that a meaningful art curriculum should include multicultural service-learning projects. The projects can be infused in a big idea and can create and answer students' questions about a big idea. The most important lesson I learned is that the project should investigate a social issue and that if the social issue involves a culture other than the students' culture a multicultural learning opportunity is born. I learned that my students had fears and misconceptions about nursing homes. At the start of the project they had the opinion

that entering a nursing home is a last resort and happens only to old people who have no family. Their opinions changed since they learned about the lives of the six nursing home residents and they now discuss reasons that living in a nursing home can be a healthy solution rather than a punishment. I believe that their former opinion of a nursing home as a scary and unpleasant place has been replaced with a new view of the nursing home as a place of love and care.

I also learned that my students love the hands on activities that are part of the art making and that they can accomplish great things when cooperative learning is well organized. I noticed that my students learned about each other during the process and this learning created a safe and nurturing classroom atmosphere. Within this group of students there is a group of four students who are only included with this group for related arts. They are isolated for the rest of each day in a classroom with only students diagnosed with educational disabilities. These four students served as equal team members, worked on their tasks, and were treated with equal respect by the other students. At times they needed some assistance and the other team members gave them assistance in subtle ways that did not point out their disability. I believe that the nature of the project facilitated this cooperation. I learned that using cooperative learning with a focus on a shared goal is a good strategy for integrating multicultural groups within my classroom.

This lesson engaged my students in exploring their own feelings about aging and dependency; and about memories of past events and places. The learning environment was rich with diversity among my students who equitably participated in social interactions while experiencing meaningful learning. The interaction with the nursing home residents taught my students the importance of respecting the culture and views of an elderly/disabled population. Years from now my students may not remember everything they heard me say to them but they will remember how they felt about this project. I heard evidence of this when a student said, "I

am glad I worked on this project, it really means a lot to me.”

Facilitating the interaction between the students and the nursing home residents developed a reciprocal learning experience and created an opportunity of empowerment for both groups. The lesson encouraged me to research social and emotional learning literature. I learned that a community based project conducted in a safe cooperative learning environment promotes intrinsic motivation for participation, enhances student cooperation and performance, and most importantly allows students to feel valued. My teaching practice has been altered because I have demonstrated that multicultural service learning is more than an act of giving; it can be woven into our curriculum as a powerful thread in the tapestry of learning and human development.

...Houses live and die: there is a time for building

And a time for living and for generation...

T.S. Eliot (Eliot)

Chapter 3: Essay 2

The purpose of A.E. 604, *Critical Dialogue about Art and Aesthetics*, is to enable art educators to effectively incorporate art criticism and aesthetic learning activities into their art curriculum. The overarching goal is to enrich both the art curriculum and the lives of the participants (students and teachers) through the enjoyment of viewing art and artifacts, talking about these objects with others, and forming new opinions and questions. The content of the course explored the differences between aesthetics and art criticism while explaining how they are interrelated in an art curriculum. The course engaged art teachers to practice various strategies including facilitating student critiques, producing interpretive short stories and essays inspired by artworks, and developing unique lesson plans for implementation in a school setting.

My personal goals specifically relevant to the content and purpose of A.E.604 were: to become a better art critic, to become better at facilitating art criticism and aesthetic learning opportunities for my students, and to become a better mentor when teaching adults to enjoy and practice art criticism while making informed aesthetic judgments.

A discussion about how aesthetic and criticism instruction is delivered (or ignored) by art and other teachers will commence my essay. Next, I will recall the significant ideas taught during A.E. 604. I will relate these ideas to issues in my teaching practice and discuss the changes I made in my curriculum. I will describe the lesson plan I developed as a result of my learning while enrolled in A.E.604. I will report my results obtained through trials and various assessments occurring as a product of the lesson plan. Finally, I will conclude with my reflection of the future of my teaching practice as it relates to the areas of art criticism and aesthetic learning activities.

Art educators are more likely to engage their students in art criticism activities than in aesthetic activities. The most recent art textbooks and resources available to art educators provide good examples of the criticism process and even provide sample questions making it easy and efficient for students to discuss their own art and the art of others. Aesthetics has not received the same attention and educators are not as comfortable discussing or teaching it. Why not, and what is aesthetics? “Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that deals with issues of beauty or the beautiful.” (Stewart, 1997, p. 2). When students engage in philosophical inquiry about their world they ask questions, change their beliefs, and broaden their definitions of what beauty is. As viewers we possess philosophical beliefs that support our attempts to find meaning in and form judgments about what we see. (Stewart, 1997, p. 7). This inquiry leads to art criticism after specific artifacts or works of art inspire the inquiry. The art criticism process is the formula that creates understanding and change within the viewer. Criticism and aesthetics are not separate activities -they are integral parts of a learning process.

Aesthetics and criticism sound like adult activities and thus may be ignored in an art education curriculum especially when the educator is less than comfortable with the process. Taking the course A.E. 604 not only gave me comfort it rekindled an excitement for “...reflecting upon, wondering about, and responding to works of art.” (Barrett T. M., 2003, p. xv). As our students explore ideas, techniques, and media during personal expressive art making the content of criticism and aesthetics should be integrated in ways that are relevant to the desired learning outcomes. It is important to acknowledge that any child enrolled in school already has a belief system and forms opinions about the beauty and value of objects. Our visual culture is vast and our children will see and experience objects for the rest of their lives and it is our role to help them gain the skills of interpretation, valuing, and judging. Arthur Efland

described the entwined nature of aesthetics with visual culture and explained the educational implication; “Our educational purpose should be to expand opportunities to enhance the *freedom of cultural life*, that is, the freedom to explore multiple forms of visual culture to enable students to understand social and cultural influences affecting their lives.” (Efland, 2004, p. 250). Marilyn Stewart explains why philosophical inquiry should be integrated into art curriculum, “Teaching aesthetics is a generative process through which students attach what they believe to ideas that are new to them, emerging with questions that they never dreamed they would have.” (Stewart, 1997, p. 75). This course provided the content and practice I needed to feel motivated to include aesthetics and criticism in my art curriculum. I believe this practice provides our students with the kind of cognitive skills needed to allow them to balance the aesthetic features of objects they see, make, purchase, or give away with their own personal meaning and value in a way that can be supported or challenged critically - not just once but throughout their journey of life.

~

The **significant ideas** encountered during the A.E. 604 course included:

- Using student critiques to help students gain insights through engagement in discussing their own art in a pleasurable way. (Barrett T. , p. xii).
- There are principles for interpreting art. (Barrett T. M., 2003, p. 198).
- Anyone can talk about and interpret works of art and that communal interpretations are the best. (Barrett T. M., 2003, p. 1).
- Art educators and other adults can interpret art and enjoy criticism activities.
- An art curriculum that integrates both aesthetics and criticism into activities, lessons, and units is a robust example of pedagogy.

During this course I learned that the best practices for conducting critiques with students are: shifting the role of the teacher from sole critic to a facilitator of student discourse, giving the students a choice in selecting the art to be discussed, ensuring equity for all students, and having a pre-determined plan for the type of discussion (descriptive, interpretive, or judgmental). (Barrett T. , pp. 4-5). The implication for me as an educator is to practice using student critiques as a way to help my students talk about art, to help my students interpret art and artifacts for meaning, and to help my student artists to decide if their art produced a message they desire to keep or change.

The complete list of Barrett's principles for interpreting art is broad and designed to allow us to feel that we are participating in a valid activity. We are not expected to use all of the principles each time we interpret an object; we apply the ones that help us the most at the time. The principles that have the most personal relevance to me are the ones that remind me that we must acknowledge our own feelings and past experiences in order for artworks to mean something to us. Interpreting art both individually and communally is a new way of thinking for me and this principal influenced me to develop a lesson plan that revised my former art criticism activity from a private endeavor to a group activity that engaged my students in a cooperative learning situation.

My students learn from activities, textbooks, media, and adults but mostly they learn from each other. This is why it is important for me to recall and implement Barrett's statement, "...interpretation is and *should be* both an individual and communal endeavor." (Barrett T. M., 2003, p. 37). Including communal activities requires more planning than simply asking a student to write a paragraph that I will later read. Activities that involve group participation and discussion take time away from studio work. The activities are fun and valuable learning takes

place however there may be some disappointment. This is evident when “We didn’t make anything...” is voiced from students. For these reasons is it easy to ignore or put off the activities involving criticism and aesthetics. The most common solutions for adding these activities are the use of criticism as an assessment tool or as solution to a mandated school-wide “bell-work” assignment. The use of criticism and aesthetic writing in these cases is entirely individual and shared only with the teacher. We owe it to our students to go further and design new and enjoyable activities that focus on aesthetics and practice criticism in a communal setting. This is a concern for the future of art education as pedagogy evolves.

During this course I wrote art criticism essays in a new way. Previously I had written a review of an artist’s exhibit at a local art gallery. I viewed the exhibit alone while taking notes and photos. After my visit I wrote a description of the pieces I selected to focus on. I carefully considered each element and principal of art and design and tried hard to find examples within each piece I was focused upon. Then I made my interpretations. Finally, I gave my opinion and judgment. Writing this essay was fun and invigorating but I never discussed the art with anyone during my writing process. The essay was published in a local newspaper. I was proud and felt accomplished. During this course I wrote a quick impression of an artwork and shared this impression with all of the other students in the course. The other students did the same. A discourse began, questions arose, opinions became stronger or changed, and I was challenged to think again. I also used research to enhance my viewpoint and make new connections and answer questions I had about the artist, time period, media, or it’s place in a body of work. After conducting the research and participating in the communal activity of discourse I wrote a more formal essay that was enriched by both the research and the previous exercise in discourse. These activities changed me - I don’t want to be alone any more!

I have taught various adult groups to practice aesthetic/criticism activities. It is a great topic to share during a school in-service and helps other teachers feel more comfortable in using objects and images as discussion topics. During my work with pre-service general education teachers I noticed a split in the class when we began to communally discuss an artwork. Those who thought they were artistic were eager to participate. Those who believed themselves to be 'not artistic' seemed determined not to participate at all. I showed them a small section of Marc Chagall's "*I and the Village*" (an image rich with symbolic elements). As they noticed objects and they related them to their own lives they formed opinions about what this painting might be about. I slowly revealed more and more of the painting. The adult students began to get ideas from each other and even dispute each other about meaning. Everyone eventually joined the discussion. All of these students described enjoying the activity, especially those who said, "I could never understand art before." They now know activities involving aesthetics and interpretation can develop as noble learning strategies and can be enjoyed by adults and children.

Prior to taking A.E. 604 I served as a mentor for two art teachers seeking certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The area they needed the most help with was teaching art criticism. I shared my experience with the four step process of describe, analyze, interpret, and judge and with games like '*Token Response*'. These teachers then practiced these activities with their students and achieved success in implementing art criticism. While some of the lessons were whole class activities these activities fell somewhat short of the communal endeavor that allows students to learn from each other. After developing and implementing my A.E. 604 lesson plan I decided that adult learners would benefit from participating in the activities themselves and would then take this experience into their own classroom to implement and expand upon. I presented the lesson at a session of the South

Carolina Art Education Fall Staff Development Conference. The adult learners participating in my session enjoyed the activity and said that they had learned a new and better way to implement art criticism activities. I produced the web site *Appreciating Art with South Carolina Art Teachers* (Cornell, 2010) from which other educators can obtain the resources connected to the lesson and learn of and share additional art appreciation activities.

During my enrollment in A.E.604 I learned that appreciation of art is a *joyful* experience and if it becomes an intrinsic part of human development a person's life is enriched. Reflecting upon the method I had been using to teach my students to practice art criticism I recalled that I asked them to view art, describe what they saw, figure out the artist's message, and make a judgment about the value or success of the art. I asked them to do this alone and write the results in the form of a short story. Was this a joyful experience for my students? My revelation was that it probably was not. Did they really want to produce a story by going through the steps or was this (to them) simply another forced writing assignment. I began a shift in my thinking about teaching art criticism with my own new experiences at communal and less formal criticism formats as practiced during our class assignments. I began to acknowledge that interpreting art is both individual and communal and that even every day objects are worth interpreting. I learned that people who experience art in their lives produce personal meaning and that is more important than attempting to discover the artist's meaning. Each activity of interpretation should be informative, interesting, and entertaining. The interpretations of others are not end points but starting points for our own interpretations. I asked myself, "How can I create new art appreciation activities that are communal, enjoyable, and meaningful to the participants?"

I designed the lesson *Fair Trade* as my solution. This lesson is a cooperative learning activity. Students are challenged to see artworks from various viewpoints and to work

individually and together to make good interpretations and find various meanings. The students enjoy role playing and using their imagination to place themselves into new situations. The students learned to see that any object has value when a viewer discovers meaning during interpretation. I believe this activity produced a joyful experience.

~

The following is a descriptive recount of my lesson plan *Fair Trade*. The four learning goals are: students will make sense of artworks, students will make good interpretations, group participation will help students with interpretations, and students will use the criticism steps of interpretation/judging/valuing interdependently. The activity requires one class period of fifty minutes. The activity begins with a two-minute power point presentation during which six pre-selected artworks are shown accompanied by text informing the students of the artist's name along with biographical facts about the artist. One slide announces that during the activity the participants will act as buyers and sellers of art during the *Fair Trade*. The class is divided into groups of six. Each group has a large reproduction of one of the featured artworks on their table. Each student will use a worksheet called *Before and After* and each group will use one worksheet called *Customer Satisfaction*. The first activity is an individual endeavor. Each student is asked to view the art and quickly write down their first impression of what they see and what they think is happening. They write it in the section called *Before* on their worksheet. The worksheet is then saved for later use. Next, each group is randomly assigned a different role-playing situation and told about the characters they will pretend to be. For example, "*You are investment bankers wishing to buy art that will go up in price and earn money.*" Or, "*You are doctors who are selecting an art work to hang in your waiting room.*" As a group the students discuss the art they have been given and decide if the group will or will not purchase it. Referring to their previous

writing on the *Before* worksheet as their evidence they share, question, argue, and decide what to do. One student is selected as the writer for the worksheet *Customer Satisfaction*. The students will compose a short letter to the artist. The letter will list the likes or complaints, requested changes, and reasons for the decision about accepting or rejecting the purchase. Next the group will pretend to be the artist. They will debate the results of the letter and make a decision about changing the art, refusing to sell the art, or accepting the sale of the art. A different student can be selected to write the artist's response letter. Each group will share the letters by reading them aloud while presenting the reproduction for viewing by the rest of the class. The concluding activity requires each student to return to the worksheet *Before and After* and individually write a second interpretation of the art. The students will indicate if they learned new things after the group activity, found new meanings within the art, or if they changed their opinions about the art in any way. This lesson can be adapted for use with any set of art reproductions or artifact objects. This lesson can be adapted for learners who do not have the skills of writing by using oral presentations, thumbs-up/thumbs-down voting, or by video recording.

~

The result I obtained from implementing the lesson plan *Fair Trade* was gathered in two categories: elementary school student participants and adult art educator participants. The elementary school student's ages ranged from nine to eleven. The elementary school students participated as part of a regular class session. The adults were art educators who participated as part of a staff development session at a state art educator's conference.

Elementary School Student Participants

One elementary student group viewed a large reproduction of the lithograph "*Earth is a Planet with One Piece Missing*" by Alexandra Nechita. In the *Before* section the students were

asked to write down who and what they see in the art, what they see happening in the art, where/when/why it occurred, what is good about the art, what is bad about the art, and what it means to themselves.



(Nechita, 1998)

- Alasysia wrote: “I see a bird in a cage and feet and squares colored in red, orange, yellow, white, and blue – the bird is the best part and looks good, the squares look bad – it means nothing to me.”
- Nayonna wrote: “I see a sun, bird, and shapes – the bird is about to fly – the artist has a passion for birds – the best part is the color – the bad part is that it seems not likeable – it means peace to me.”
- Tra’Lashia wrote: “I see a bird – the sun is rising and the bird is coming from its nest – it is early morning – it is good because it is about peace – it is bad because it looks like the bird is locked in a cage – it means peace to me.”

- Nyesha wrote: “I see a swan and a bunch of hands – people are reaching up at the swan out of the water – the swan is lost – it happened a long time ago in the sea – it is good because the duck is in a cage – it is bad because it might not be a good gift to a friend – it means earth is a planet with one peace missing.”

The group activity began by giving the group a role-playing assignment. This group became adults who have the same parents and want to buy the art as their parent’s anniversary gift. After discussing what each group member wrote about the art on their individual worksheets they debated and decided if the art was a good choice for their purchase or if the art failed to meet the goal of serving as a good gift for their parents. One student wrote a letter to the artist on the worksheet *Customer Satisfaction*. The group composed the letter.

This group wrote:

“Dear Alexandra Nechita,

I think you should take the swan out of the circle because the swan does not show any action in the picture. Then we will accept your work.

Sincerely, Nayona, Alasysia, Tra’Lashia, and Nyesha”

Another student wrote the reply letter from the artist. The group composed the letter.

This group wrote:

“Dear Nayona, Alasysia, Tra’Lashia, and Nyesha,

I will take this swan out.

Sincerely, Alexandria Nechita”

The students then returned to the *Before/After* worksheet and answered three questions: What new thing did you learn about the art after the group activity, what does the art mean to you now, and did your opinion change during the group activity?

- Alasysia wrote: “I learned nothing new – to me now it means that the bird is trapped and needs help – my opinion changed.”
- Nayonna wrote: “The new things I learned are the art has peace and the swan was taken out – to me now it means movement – my opinion changed.
- Tra’Lashia wrote: “I learned nothing new – to me now it means a peaceful morning – my opinion changed.”
- Nyesha wrote: “I learned nothing new that is really interesting – to me now it means that it was made a long time ago – my opinion changed.”

The students each described different things and expressed different opinions. They interpreted the artist’s use of the word *piece* as a metaphor for *peace*. In general they saw the bird as a symbol of peace but were confused about it being shown in a circle or cage. As I read their letter to the artist and read about their changed opinions I became aware that they focused on the way the artist interpreted the trapping of an object (the bird) that normally moves about with the freedom of flight. I believe that without the group activity the students would have accepted that this was a nice colorful image of peace based on their reading of the title and their view of the image. I don’t think they would have truly investigated how the artist used the colors and images to convey her message or find their own personal message. The students newly formed opinions show that they formed a new meaning – peace can become trapped and that peace needs help to be released.

After the activity the students of this class expressed various opinions about the activity. Some students said that it was the most fun they had had in art all year. All students said that they enjoyed the role-playing. Some students said they didn’t like the activity because they didn’t get to make anything. These comments support the theory that art criticism and aesthetic

learning is enjoyable however it does take away studio time. I believe the learning that occurred during this lesson was valuable and that including this lesson was a benefit to my student's current and future learning.

Adult Art Educator Participants

This group consisted of one middle school and two elementary school art teachers. These teachers selected the workshop *Fair Trade: Art Appreciation Activities* from a group of ongoing sessions at a state art education conference. This group participated in the same activity as previously described with the elementary student participants. Additionally, this group was assessed for data concerning their use of art criticism and/or aesthetic activities in the past, what the workshop taught them, and how they might change their curriculum based on information or learning from the workshop.

The teacher group viewed a large reproduction of "*Cantileve*" by Nancy Graves. The teachers were motivated to interpret the art alone and wrote very detailed answers to the *Before* questions. They showed excitement about role-playing and they selected to pretend to be pop-stars buying the art for a centerpiece of an 'after party' following their next concert. The teachers enjoyed the discourse and easily came to a conclusion and decision about the purchase of the art.



(Graves, 1983)

This is a summary of their answers to the *Before* section:

- Teacher 1 wrote, “organic, abstract, texture, balance, movement – reminds me of an old circus –shows personal identity or humanity – the bad thing is that the meaning is ambiguous, I want to know what it means so it can have meaning – to me it means a balancing act.”
- Teacher 2 wrote, “3-D, natural objects, movement, dancing, outside on a dirt road, expressing openness, it is good because the interesting use of lines draws you through the movement, to me it means outside, love for nature and outdoors.”
- Teacher 3 wrote, “figurativeness, found objects, assemblage, vertical curve – lady with hat and hair celebrating – outside in the breeze – wind blowing her hat – it is good because it has a feeling of work – to me it means (blank space).”

During the group discussion the teachers conveyed what they liked about the art and discussed why they thought it was good or bad. As they thought about the value of the art for the pop stars party one teacher began to question the size and stability of the work. This triggered an investigation into researching the information printed on the reproduction. When they read it was

made of metal one teacher said that made her think of the term heavy metal as a description of bands. Then the conversation focused on the delicate nature of the work and how this might or might not suit the pop stars depending upon their degree of heavy metal or soft rock style.

The letter they wrote said,

“Dear Nancy Graves,

As pop stars, we are very interested in purchasing your work for a party. We love the colors and forms in your work and believe it would connect well with our musical friends. However, would you be able to reinforce the base? We feel it might not be stable enough to withstand our party guests.”

Sincerely, The Pop Stars”

In the artist reply letter the teachers wrote,

“Dear Pop Stars,

I would love to sell you my piece! However, I believe that adding reinforcements would change the overall feel of the piece in a negative way. It should be able to withstand many environments!

Sincerely, Nancy Graves”

It is obvious that the teachers enjoyed the activity as evidenced by their lively discussion and humorous writing in the letters to and from the artist. In the *After* section of the worksheet the teachers described new learning, meaning, and changed or unchanged opinions.

- Teacher 1 wrote, “I learned it is very heavy and made of metal – I see a more musical quality to it now – my opinion of it did not change.”
- Teacher 2 wrote, “I learned it is more stable and delicate than I saw it as at first – It still means openness and appreciation of nature – my opinion of it did not change.”

- Teacher 3 wrote, “I learned that it could be used as a rock stars art work and that you can get a feel of music and metal in it, it’s not just figurative – to me it now means weightlessness, flowing into the atmosphere – my opinion of it did not change.”

As art teachers they were skilled at finding the formal qualities at first glance. They were not as skilled at interpretation when working alone. The discourse opened new visions and created new meanings for the teachers. One teacher wrote that she needed to know the meaning for the work to have meaning. I think the activity allowed her to discover meaning without ever knowing the artist’s original intended meaning. It was interesting to me that the teachers saw musical quality within the work and attached the meaning of flowing movement (such as in music) to the piece after pretending to be the pop stars. They experienced the revelation that meaning is derived from personal experience and personal need. What the artist had in mind may not be what it means to the viewer but what it means to the viewer is precious. This supports Barrett’s principal that attaching meaning is personal and finding meaning is joyful.

The assessment data informed me that teachers do include art interpretation and art appreciation in their curriculum however it is usually in the form of an individual activity. The teachers learned a new way to provide art interpretation in their curriculum by participating in the workshop activity of *Fair Trade*. The teachers appreciated the method of group discussion, role-playing, and group valuing because it provides an alternative to writing assignments. The teachers are motivated to discover or create even more ways to incorporate aesthetic and criticism activities into their art curriculum. This is a summary of their comments:

- Teacher 1 wrote, “I include appreciation/interpretation activities occasionally -My students participate in “museum walk” by walking around reproductions or student art and putting a post-it note on their favorite – I learned how to implement appreciation

tactics and vocabulary and how to adapt the lesson for students who can't write – I want to find more ways to incorporate interpretation and appreciation into the classroom.”

- Teacher 2 wrote, “I include appreciation/interpretation activities on a regular basis – I use art criticism for bell work: each week a new art work is displayed, each day the students write in a journal and answer one step of the art criticism process, on the fifth day they draw the image – I want to learn to motivate my students to be interested in art criticism – I learned creative ways to incorporate interpretation and higher-level thinking skills other than just writing sentences and paragraphs.”
- Teacher 3 wrote, “I include appreciation/interpretation activities on a regular basis – I include class discussion, individual writing, and group writing – I want to learn new ideas to use in my class – I want to try this lesson “as is” – I want to learn more group ideas.”

This data concludes that art criticism and aesthetic learning is considered as a valuable component of an art education curriculum but the activities designed for students to participate in this learning are not always interesting or motivating for students or adults. Unless you are writing a criticism essay that will be published for others to read the act of writing can be viewed as a chore within a learning environment rather than as a joyful routine or welcomed activity. I am excited that these educators are inspired to create new activities and I hope they will share them with other educators. I too wish to increase my students motivation, participation, and learning through art interpretation and appreciation as I blend these activities into my curriculum as integral parts of a meaningful art learning experience for all of my students.

~

My participation, learning, and lesson plan development made possible by participating in A.E. 604 will have a profound effect upon my future teaching practice. I held an interest in

aesthetic and interpretation learning before taking this class and now I have a love for it. The shift in my thinking about it is that discovering meaning does not seek original intentions – it allows and encourages personal growth by purging us of our own perilous emotions or enhancing us with new favorable emotions. I also have a new appreciation for including group participation during aesthetic and interpretive learning activities. I formerly believed that working alone was the best way to participate in interpreting art and that working with others was accomplished by reading the work of others. During this course the experience of group discourse (along with adding relevant research) showed me that working as a single mind falls short in the quest for the potential of meaningful interpretation and personal meaning making. I am convinced that my lesson plan will continue to serve my students as a joyful and meaning filled learning activity. I believe that sharing my lesson plan with other art educators will impact the learning of both the adult educator participants and will in turn impact their students. Together we all grow and learn.

Chapter 4: Conclusion/Synthesis

My participation in the mostly online master's art education program has nurtured my growth as a teacher, an artist, and an art appreciator. As I entered the program I was aware of using big ideas and big questions as a starting point for exploration in the visual art discipline. As I progressed in the program I learned more about the interconnectedness of big ideas with material, process, product, assessment, and appreciation. Throughout the program I began to feel comfortable with blending big ideas into a curriculum rich with meaningful expression created by my students. As I conclude the program I am confident that my skills as a facilitator of learning experiences designed to evoke personal investigations, creative responses, excitement and understanding of contemporary art expression, and meaningful assessments are enhanced. The most significant facet of change involves my understanding that the point of all learning is personal and that meaningful instruction addresses learning focused on the evolution of self.

Learning to include contemporary art and contemporary visual culture was the first step in my master's journey. My former curriculum included modern works of art that were found in current art textbooks and newsworthy art. As current as these resources were they were not as contemporary as the works I learned about during my first course during the initial summer session. I found that learning about contemporary artists, their methods and material choices, and their reasons for making art was personally stimulating and stirred me to continue investigating contemporary art both for my own investigation and for material to share with my students. With technology I am able to connect my students with appropriate sources of contemporary visual art and culture. One example is the use of a smart board to show videos from the Tate Kids website. One of my students said that she looked forward to coming to art each week because the videos were so interesting and inspiring. I also learned about the great work of PBS in the making of the

Art21 series. Many of these artists, while creating my body of work, inspired me. This collection of themed-based contemporary artist's stories helped me to find connections between contemporary artists and the big ideas being investigated by students. I was influenced by Pepón Osorio to explore of the big idea of place with my students and this became the inspiration for my student's meaningful and effective service learning project *Nursing Home Visits*.

The next segment of my journey challenged me to consider myself as an artist. I selected the big idea of time to investigate through producing a body of works. I also selected change and repetition as topics to explore within the big idea of time. My life experiences and my concerns for my future were my personal connections. The artworks I produced are meaningful because creating them allowed me the freedom to express my doubts and joys and to create artworks in any way I wanted to and not in ways other people expected me to. The artworks I created are not the usual products I would normally create. I went beyond learning a skill to create something pleasing; I created something pleasing because I applied my skills to express an idea of my own.

I have changed my mind about when and how to make artworks. I had a fear of using an artmaking process because I doubted that I had anything interesting to express, at least that anyone would care to view. Viewing the *Art21* films allowed me to realize that other artists have the same fears but they still explore ideas. As I learned of their investigations and personal life stories their art became more interesting and meaningful to me. I used them as role models for my own new practice of artmaking. I learned that personal investment is what makes the artworks interesting to create and interesting to view. Artworks made without personal investment can be dull and ordinary. In order to create my body of artworks I personally invested my time in research, reflecting on what I already knew, and forming new connections between all of them. This investment gave me rich ideas and helped me to produce unusual artwork.

Prior to entering the master's program I had an interest in art criticism, appreciation, and aesthetic learning. I practiced and taught the system of description, analysis, judgment, and valuing as a rigid step-by-step process. I was lucky to have met Terry Barrett when he was a co-presenter during a summer institute I attended in 1993, but I had not read his books. During our course work I felt that his writing about art interpretation and criticism truly inspired me to change my way of thinking. Two of his principles, "Artworks are always about something" and, "We make good impressions" gave me the clarity to see that what is important is finding personal meaning not seeking the prize of finding the artist's meaning. Barrett emphasized this idea with a quote from Barzman, "we *produce* meaning..." informing me that interpretations already made, while informative, interesting, and entertaining should not be an end point of acceptance but rather a beginning point for one's personal journey of interpretive activity. Another of Barrett's principals changed the way I design appreciation-learning experiences for my students. He states, "Interpreting art is an endeavor that is both individual and communal." I believe that students learn more when group interpretation is included with individual interpretation activities. I learned that it did make a difference when I presented my interpretation lesson, *Fair Trade*. In my teaching practice I now take the time and effort to include group interpretation work. The students really appreciate and enjoy it. Communal discussions that include shared interests is an important overarching skill for students to practice and put into place in their life long learning journey. I have learned valuable lessons concerning talking about student art during the critique process. I learned that better interpretations occur when the activities of describing, analyzing, and judging are used interdependently (the "hermeneutic circle" of interpretation). Another valuable lesson I learned is Barrett's principal, "All art is in part about other art." I was awakened to the idea that all art *is* interpretation and that

all interpretations provide media for new art. I appreciate this shift in my awareness.

Learning to create meaningful curriculum was an invaluable part of my development as an accomplished art teacher. During this course I practiced how to blend a big idea, essential questions, contemporary art, studio skills, critiques, and assessment into a unit rich with meaningful personal explorations for my students. Prior to this experience I developed lessons that were not connected and jumped without cause from culture to culture, skill to skill, or media to media. While my students were enjoying the various experiences they were not forming the type of meaningful integrated learning that was possible. Now my students learn not only how someone else created art but why they created it. They create art not to copy things or images but to investigate and solve personal questions. The resulting products have changed from similar looking pieces to very unique and personal expressive pieces. This is genuine learning.

In my teaching practice I have struggled to include testing and assessment because I lacked the experience to use it to increase learning. When I did use it I was mainly trying to prove I had done something right. My prior thinking was conflicted by the seemingly imbalanced use of assessment when individual artworks were judged as best or worst when compared to whole class results. I couldn't imagine an enticing test. This thinking changed as I began to see that the method of using big ideas, questions, and personal responses allows for students to show growth and understanding regardless of the outcome of the finished artwork and that students can be measured individually not just in comparison to others. This kind of assessment is enticing!

The following describes what I have changed in my teaching practice as it relates to curriculum, learning, and assessment. Knowing my students and personalizing their learning with the goal of empowering my students to see themselves as effective contributing members of a real community should guide what I plan for my students to see and do. I can't just expect my

students to learn. I must encourage and support learning for all students by actively engaging them in meaningful curriculum and assessment. I must design this curriculum/assessment following the most current information concerning how students learn. I believe it is important to: consider big ideas; help students connect facts, skills, and experiences to the big ideas; value student work; allow students to discover rather than remember ideas; promote excellence by providing clear expectations and samples of quality work; use student and self reflection to adjust curriculum; allow for multiple paths in finding solutions; and keep instruction personalized not generalized. The areas I want to continue to improve upon are collaboration with other teachers during big idea units. I believe it is important to share the connection of the projects with other core disciplines and including other teachers adds more points of view. I also will seek ways to include more family involvement in big idea units.

Over the years I have built a curriculum with an emphasis on inclusion of the art of all cultures, however I defined the cultures mainly by geography. I now realize that many more cultures can be considered and including even more variety will enrich my curriculum and open up the doors I want to invite my students to pass through. I had become unhappy about including service-learning projects in my curriculum. I was complacent into accepting the curriculum of charity giving as the only form of service learning. Even making art to go along with the charity giving is a minimal form of service learning. Designing a project for my students that involved reciprocal learning was a challenge that required planning and time. The former type of service learning did not and this is why, I believe, it had become the model – it was quick, repetitive (new instruction not needed), and did not interrupt the focus of the standard curriculum. It looked good on paper but little learning was taking place. The contributors and recipients became more differentiated than united. There was no student or teacher reflection, the projects did not require

or inspire any. I was challenged during my master's program to design a meaningful service-learning project that also included multicultural learning. My service-learning project *Nursing Home Visits* has been the most rewarding lesson I have ever participated in. It was not easy to plan and, like big ideas, one can never stop thinking about it. I believe my students will reflect upon this learning for years to come as they progress through life.

My idea of research was nothing like what I learned while presenting my research paper. I thought research involved applying what an expert had discovered in order to improve my method of doing something. I had no idea research could occur within my own classroom. I loved using the method of student interviews for assessment information about what is really being learned, what is not being learned, and what is important to my students. I thought I knew those answers, I was wrong. The action research method of looking, thinking, and acting is a valuable tool I have acquired. I am now able to assess my curriculum, my students learning, and my individual lessons with validity and I can trust my results.

The emerging theme that defines me as a master of art education embraces my role as facilitator of investigations of big ideas, meaningful learning activities, and joyful experiences. I believe that my students are just like me – trying to understand the world and our place in it. All of the diverse activities included in a meaning filled art education program lead to answers and new questions. My students need me to deliver and implement the content and vision. I need my students to create the meaning and messages they and I learn from while we share the results with the world.

References

Work Cited

Barrett, T. M. (2003). *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding*. NY, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill.

Barrett, T. *Talking about Student Art*. (M. G. Stewart, Ed.) Worcester, Massachusetts, USA: Davis Publications, Inc.

Cho, M. (2007, Summer). Artistically Serving: A Rationale for Arts-Based Service-Learning. (C. Davis, Ed.) *NAEA Advisory* .

Cornell, B. (2010). *Appreciating Art with South Carolina Art Teachers*. From Appreciating Art with South Carolina Art Teachers: <http://scartappreciation.weebly.com>

Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Weissberg, R. P., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development* , 82 (1), 405-432.

Efland, A. D. (2004). The Entwined Nature of the Aesthetic: A Discourse on Visual Culture. *Studies in Art education A Journal of Issues and Research* , 45 (3), 250.

Eliot, T. (n.d.). *quartets/coker*. Retrieved March 8, 2011 from tristian: <http://www.tristian.icom43.net/quarters/coker.html>

Graves, N. (1983). *Whitey*. (W. M. Art, Producer) Retrieved May 15, 2011 from Whitney: <http://whitney.org/Collection/NancyGraves>

Hutzel, K. (2006). *A Handbook for Integrating Service Learning into the Art Classroom*. From Florida State University: www.fsu.edu/~flserve/resources/handbook/Foundations.pdf

Lawton, P. H. (2010, November). Hand-in Hand, Building Community on Common Ground.

(F. Bastos, Ed.) *The Journal of the National Art Education Association* , 63 (6), p. 8.

Nechita, A. (1998). *ARTBrokerage*. Retrieved May 15, 2011 from ARTBrokerage.com:

<http://artbrokerage.com/artist/Alexandra-Nechita/Earth-is-a-Planet-With-One-Piece-Missing-11057>

Osorio, P. Details of "Tina's House" Photo by Gloria O'Connel. *"Home Visit"*. Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, FL, USA.

Stewart, M. G. (1997). *Thinking through Aesthetics*. (M. G. Stewart, Ed.) Worcester, Massachusetts, USA: Davis Publications, Inc.

Sollins, S. (Producer), & Tatge, C. (Director). (2003). *art:21 Art in the twenty-First Century, Season one, episode:Place* [Motion Picture]. PBS Home Video.

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *State & County Quick Facts*. Retrieved February 26, 2011 from U.S. Census Bureau: <http://quickfacts.census.gov.qfd/states/45/45085.html>

Appendix

“Nursing Home Visits”, 16 minute DVD, produced by Beverly Cornell to showcase the images and voices of the participants.